

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 31, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
United States Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to share with you our concerns about the possible impact of the proposed Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative on tourism between Michigan and Canada and Michigan's economy. Securing our borders is a top priority for us and we have supported numerous initiatives to increase staffing at the border and provide advanced detection technology to prevent terrorists and their weapons from entering the United States. However, people and businesses in Michigan are concerned that the Initiative would create a border that is neither safe nor convenient for most people to cross.

As you know, beginning on December 31, 2007, the Initiative would require anyone entering the United States via a U.S.-Canadian land border to have a passport. Currently, a U.S. passport costs \$97 and takes approximately six weeks to process unless the applicant pays an additional fee to expedite processing. There is tremendous concern from our constituents that this requirement would adversely affect the tourism and retail industry on both sides of the border.

Michigan and Canada have a strong commercial trade relationship. In 2004, Michigan and Canada traded between \$70 billion in commercial goods, the majority of which are in the automotive sector. In addition to commercial trade, tourism between Michigan and Canada is a significant part of the region's economy. In 2004, 1.7 million Michigan residents visited Canada and 1.1 million Canadians visited Michigan generating over \$640 million for their economies.

In addition to the benefits to Michigan and Canada's economy from trade and tourism, it is important to understand the close relationship between people in Michigan and Canada. People in Michigan do not see Canada as an exotic foreign destination like other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Much of the travel between Michigan and Canada is casual and spontaneous. Many Michigan residents have vacation homes in Canada, or they take weekend trips to theaters, museums, sports events or concerts. It would be prohibitive for a family of four to wait six weeks and spend nearly \$400 for passports to visit Toronto or Windsor for a long weekend.

If a new form of documentation is required to enter the United States from Canada we are sure that it will have a dramatic impact on cross border trade and tourism. One example is the annual CANUSA games. Every August, Flint, Michigan or Hamilton, Ontario alternately hosts approximately 1,500 young athletes under the age of 18 for a weekend of competition in 15 different sports. Since most of the participants do not have passports and could not afford them, the 50th anniversary of the CANUSA games in 2007 could be the last if every participant needs a passport to participate in 2008.

We recognize that the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) mandates that you develop a plan to verify the citizenship of everyone entering the United States, and we believe that this requirement can be satisfied in a way that does not inhibit the safe and secure travel between the United States and Canada. We encourage you to carefully consider the suggestions offered during the public comment period. Specifically, we recommend you consider harmonizing the requirements of the IRTPA and the provisions of the REAL ID Act. We would also ask you to consider the needs of special groups – for example, seniors and children – that may not have the resources to comply with the passport requirement. Finally, we would ask that you consider the often prohibitive time and cost of complying with the proposed travel requirements.

As you know, last December the Department of Homeland Security announced an effort to reduce transit times at U.S.-Canadian border crossings in southeast Michigan by 25 percent. We understand that the 25% Challenge has had a measurable impact on waiting times at the border. We thank you for taking the initiative to make our borders more efficient and secure, and note that it would be unfortunate if your hard work to reduce transit times at Michigan border crossings went to waste because of the potentially devastating impact of the passport requirement on travel between the Michigan and Canada.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to make our borders safe, secure and efficient for tourism and trade.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow



Carl Levin